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STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE STRATEGIC LEADER: BORN OR MADE

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES E. LENDERMAN United States Marine Corps

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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BY

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ABSTRACT

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The age old question: Is a leader born or is he made? This same question also pertains to a Strategic Leader. In this paper I discuss some of the conceptions or misconceptions that people have about inherited leadership characteristics. I also discuss some academic and military views on leadership, define Strategic Leadership, and defend my position that Strategic Leaders can be made.

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The Strategic Leader: Born or Made?

Section 1

INTRODUCTION

The age old question: Is a leader born or is he made? This same question also pertains to a Strategic Leader. I may never be able to get all of you to agree on whether a Strategic Leader is born or made, but I believe that most will agree that with the right kind of education people can be taught to be a Leader or a Strategic Leader. Maybe not a great one, but one that can get the job done. In this paper I intend to look at some conceptions or misconceptions that people have about inherited leadership characteristics, discuss some academic and military views on leadership, define Strategic Leadership, and defend my position that Strategic Leaders can be made.

Before a decision can be made on whether a Strategic Leader is born or made, I need to address some basic questions. I believe that problems should be broken down to the lowest level and solutions begun from there. There are two primary areas that must be studied. First, our physical characteristics and second our mental characteristics. I want to make the point that I divide physical and mental characteristics into two subcategories: Those which we inherit and those which we develop. This is the key point in showing you that Strategic Leaders are MADE, not BORN. Physical and mental characteristics will determine whether or not you are capable of doing any assigned task and it is those that we develop that I believe are the most important.

Section 2

COMMON MAN'S CONCEPTIONS OR MISCONCEPTIONS

where you were when." The theory was: what you are today, what you believe in, your values, was determined by where you were, inner city dweller, country cowboy, e.g., when you developed your basic beliefs in life. The only time you changed these beliefs is when some significant event occurred in your life to modify them. I think most, if not all, will concur that joining the military was a significant event in our life. It changed my views on leadership. Thus, before I get into the discussion on whether strategic leaders are born or made, I need to discuss some of the conceptions or misconceptions about leaders that we were taught while we were growing up. This discussion will provide a "frame of reference" that will hopefully help us make sense of a complex subject.

We've all heard people say that "He's a born Leader", or "He's a natural athlete". These statements were normally heard when people were talking about athletes. Why do people make these statements? It's a learned response. We learned to equate leadership ability with athletic ability. If you were a good athlete then you were frequently viewed as a good leader. When we were growing up most of us idolized professional athletes. Our coaches and teachers talked about athletes as good role models and leaders. One problem was that athletes also had the reputation of

not being very smart. One misconception I learned while growing up was that your athletic ability determined if you were a good leader and being smart was not a required characteristic.

However, the quarterback was always considered a better leader than a lineman. This was my first realization that intelligence was also associated with being a good leader.

My learned misconception was that physical ability determined my leadership ability. If you wanted to be a leader, play football. At first this was easy to accept. However, as I grew older I noticed something strange about professional football players. There were no professional football players under five feet tall. Therefore, my learned response was that "if you are not taller than five feet you cannot be a professional football player or a Leader". This did not make sense to me. You normally inherit basic physical and mental characteristics from your ancestors. In fact I doubt that there is anyone who will not agree. The paradigm I had learned was athletes and thus leaders were born and not made. In the next sections I will provide proof you can learn to be a Strategic Leader.

Section 3

ACADEMIC VIEWS

Over the past twenty years I have learned much about leadership. Numerous books and articles address leadership. In fact, there have been more than one thousand articles and books

written on leadership since 1994.² What I intend to do in this section is discuss some of the conclusions which academic researchers and authors, from various backgrounds, have written concerning whether leadership is learned or something with which we are born.

JOHN W. GARDNER ON LEADERSHIP

John W. Gardner earned his Ph.D. in 1938, taught psychology at numerous universities and was an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps in World War II. He also served six presidents of the United States in various leadership capacities. He drew most of his conclusions from an intensive five-year field study of organizations and interviews with hundreds of contemporary leaders.

""Can Leadership be taught?" is an emphatic but qualified "Yes"-emphatic because most of the ingredients of leadership can be taught, qualified because the ingredients that cannot be taught may be quite important. The notion that all the attributes of a leader are innate is demonstrably false. No doubt certain characteristics are genetically determined-level of energy, for example. But the individual's hereditary gifts, however notable, leave the issue of future leadership performance undecided, to be settled by later events and influences"³

At first one might think Mr. Gardner is trying to walk on both sides of the fence. On one hand he writes leadership can be taught but believes there are some inherited characteristics that may be important. His position is typical, ie., the majority of strategic leadership characteristics are developed but some

important ones could or may be inherited.

Some inherited ingredients may be quite important if you concur that intelligence is one of these. You must have some level of intelligence in order to function. What level of intelligence you must inherit to function as a Strategic Leader could be debated. The minimum GCT scores that the military requires for someone to be an officer are not the genius level. No relationship has been shown that a person with a high GCT score will become a better Strategic Leader than someone with an average score. You can take any individual with average intelligence, and physical characteristics and TEACH them to be a strategic leader, if they have the desire, are willing to make sacrifices, and have the opportunity.

All the characteristics required of a Strategic Leader can be learned. Inherited characteristics only make the process easier and may enable some individuals to reach the level of GREAT Strategic Leader. Even Gardner's example: genetically determined-level of energy, can be developed. The amount of personal energy you have is partly a function of your level of physical fitness. However, his emphatic position is leadership can be taught.

"Most of the capabilities that enable an outstanding leader to lead are learned. Ronald Reagan's extraordinary communication skills were the product of many decades of professional experience. Douglas MacArthur's strategic and tactical brilliance in World War II was the product of a lifetime of study and action."

"Young people with substantial native gifts for leadership often fail to achieve what is in them to achieve. So part of our task is to develop what is naturally there but in need of cultivation. Talent is one thing: its triumphant expression is quite another. Some talents express themselves freely and with little need for encouragement. But generally speaking, the maturing of any complex talent requires a happy combination of motivation, character and opportunity. Most human talent remains undeveloped."

Mr. Gardner believes you can teach someone to be a leader. However he puts emphasis on the genetically determined, unmeasurable ingredients. These undefined, inherited characteristics, should make you a better Strategic Leader than you would have been without them, but they alone will not make you a Strategic Leader. If Strategic Leaders were born and not made and you wanted to identify a Strategic Leader, early in his career, it would be very difficult. First you would have to determine which strategic leadership characteristics are inherited, which ones are developed, and then try to locate the individual who had these so-called genetically determined characteristics. This concept of inherited characteristics diverts attention from the importance of education to leader development.

LEADERS: THE STRATEGIES FOR TAKING CHARGE

In researching varied sources I found some interesting information written by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus. Warren Bennis has held professorships at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management and Harvard. He is

currently the Joseph DeBell Professor of Management at the University of Southern California. Burt Nanus is the founder and director of the Center of Futures Research at the University of Southern California. Bennis and Nanus came to their conclusions after conducting a series of ninety interviews, sixty with successful CEOs, all corporate presidents or chairmen of boards, and thirty with outstanding leaders from the public sector. The only shared attribute they considered worth mentioning was almost all were married to their first spouse and they were very enthusiastic about marriage as an institution. There were no obvious patterns for their success. Some were right-brained others left-brained, there were tall, short, fat, and thin. There were articulate, inarticulate, assertive and retiring. Some dressed for success and others dressed for failure, and some were participative and autocratic.

Bennis and Nanus came to their conclusions after extensive research. There were three questions that they always asked.

(1) What are your strengths and weaknesses? (2) Was there any particular experience or event in your management philosophy or style? and (3) What were the major decision points in your career and how do you feel about your choices now? It was a search for similarities in a wildly diverse group. Half of the 60 CEOs were from Fortune's top-200 list, median age 56, average income \$400,00. The average number of years with the company was 22.5 and the number of years as CEO was 8.5. Most had college degrees-25 percent with advanced degrees and about 40% with degrees in

business. The public sector was more varied. It included: university presidents, a head of a major government agencies, a former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, coaches, orchestra conductors, public interest leaders a former astronaut and others. They searched for similarities in a wildly diverse group and concluded that:

"The truth is that major capacities and competencies of leadership can be learned, and we are all educable, at least if the basic desire to learn is there and we do not suffer from serious learning disorders. Furthermore, whatever natural endowments we bring to the role of leadership, they can be enhanced; nurture is far more important than nature in determining who becomes a successful leader. This is not to suggest that it is easy to learn to be a leader. There is no simple formula, no rigorous science, no cookbook that leads inexorably to successful leadership. Instead, it is a deeply human process, full of trial and error, victories and defeats, timing and happenstance, intuition and insight."8

Two leadership concepts brought up by Bennis and Nanus are the "Great Man" and the "Big Bang" theories: The Great Man theory states:

"Leadership skills were once thought a matter of birth. Leaders were born, not made, summoned to their calling through some unfathomable process. It saw power as being vested in a very limited number of people whose inheritance and destiny made them leaders. Those of the right breed could lead: all others must be led. Either you had it or you didn't. No amount of learning or yearning could change your fate."

In the distant past most leaders held their positions because of who their fathers were. If your father was the king of England then you were destined to be a selected leader. Birth controlled everything. Even during the American Civil War rich individuals were able to finance an army unit and make themself

the leader. When we study these situations we find some of those individuals became good leaders and some were failures. Studying leadership can not always satisfactory explain why some leaders failed and others succeeded.

Bennis and Nanus also discussed the notion that great events made leaders of otherwise ordinary people. This is the "Big Bang" theory. The idea is that Lenin was just "milling about" when a revolution presented itself, and Washington was simply at the right place at the right time when the colonies opted for countrydom. The authors came to the same conclusion that most people do when studying leadership, that "...this "Big Bang" idea in which the situation and the followers combined to make a leader, like the "Great Man" theory, was another inadequate definition."

Your childhood and adolescence provide you with basic values and role models (mentors). Books and classroom instruction can also help you understand what's going on. However, most of the learning takes place during the experience itself. Without education, formal or informal, we would not know what or how to do things. We could learn from mentors, but a good mentor is not always available. Education, through mentors, classroom instruction, books, and experience is the way to learn about leadership. "Leadership seems to be the marshaling of skills possessed by a majority but used by a minority. But it's something that can be learned by anyone, taught to everyone, denied to no one."11

MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

In the two earlier sections I looked at an experienced Marine's position, two primary academics views, and now I'm going to present the position of two professors who once served at the Air Force Academy. Robert L. Taylor is dean of the School of Business at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. He previously served as a missile launch control officer, a combat defense operations officer, and professor and the head of the Department of Management at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Col. William E Rosenbach is the Evans Professor of Eisenhower Leadership Studies at Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania. He has served as a staff officer, commander, and acting head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Everybody tries to develop one perfect plan all can use to produce leaders on an assembly line. Such a plan does not exist. "There is a continuous quest for a single text that reduces leadership to a set of learnable skills. We continue to believe that no such book exists. Because leadership is a process of human interactions involving an infinite variety of individual personalities and specific situations, there is no one right answer." ¹² Taylor and Rosenbach believe there is a special relationship, a bond which can exist between leaders and their followers. I think this idea should be explored farther than the authors take it. The bond that can exist between subordinates and the leader is very important. Why is it some leaders do much

better than others when, "according to their past performance", this should not have happened? Leaders can be weak in some areas but because of this bond or human relationship, their followers rise to the occasion when needed and the leader is successful. They rise to the occasion because they know their leader will take care of them. If you take care of your people, they'll take care of you. This characteristic can be learned. I learned this early in my military career. Mentors are important to learning this particular lesson.

Taylor and Rosenbach, when discussing leadership characteristics, described the leaders' vision:

"Leadership starts with a vision for the future. What sets leaders apart from others is an ability to "see" and put into perspective what others cannot. The vision is not a daydream: rather, it is a goal for the future state of affairs for an organization and its people. This vision becomes a commitment, a drive and a focus of energy." 13

Vision is a major part of Strategic Leadership and was defined well by the authors. They believe vision is more important than other characteristics. Without vision, you can't be a Strategic Leader according to the definition of Strategic Leadership used by the U.S. Army War College. Strategic Leadership is the process used by a leader to effect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision. This will be covered in greater detail in Section V.

Some people have the belief that a high Intelligence

Quotient (IQ) is important in determining leadership ability. In
fact minimum Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores are used in

many colleges and the military to determine a base line for acceptance into an organization. To prove their point that intelligence is not a requirement for being a successful leader Taylor and Rosenbach used statistics which emphasize that intelligence does not always determine who is the best leader. "Brain trusting and whiz Kidding are not what it takes. Of 105 major generals who served in Would War I, 56 had failed to score above the middle of their class in mathematics. Of 275 in World War II, 158, or 58 percent, were in the middle group or among the dubs in the same subject."14 Society normally associates mathematical competency with high intelligence. Therefore, the statistics would tend to validate their belief and mine, IQ is not a qualifier or disqualifier to being a great leader. However, one must have an average IQ or a basic general classification test (GCT) of around 120. Taylor and Rosenbach's conclusions support my position, leaders are made, not born.

"Can you learn leadership? There are some people who will never be leaders: fortunately for both them and us, most of these people do not aspire to leadership. Similarly, there are some who do seem truly to be born to lead. Many great leaders, like many great baseball players or opera singers, are naturals. They will lead whether trained in leadership or not. But for most of us, training and/or education can help. Learning on the job and growing through experience can help even more."15

The above statements summarize my basic beliefs about leaders being made not born. Leaders grow with experience. But, some people will never become leaders. However, the reason that they will not become leaders is not because they can not be taught,

but that they do not have the "desire" to be a leader. They are not willing to make the sacrifices required of a leader.

The U.S. Marine position on leadership is similar to the authors in their conclusions on teaching leadership. The Marines believe that they can teach someone to be a leader. I use myself as an example. I knew very little about leadership until I joined the Marines. Through education and experience over the last 21 years I have LEARNED leadership.

Taylor and Rosenbach continually return to the same theme:

Can we teach people to become leaders? People are still divided on this question. The majority currently believe that, most leaders have learned their leadership ability rather than inherited it. There is still a lot of mystery to leadership.

"Learning About Leadership: Permit me to return again to the question of whether leadership can be learned, and possibly taught. Students, and anyone else for that matter, can profitably be exposed to leadership, discussions of leadership skills and styles, and leadership strategies and theories. Individuals can learn the strengths as well as limitations of leadership. People can learn about the paradoxes and contradictions and ironies of leadership, which, however puzzling, are central to appreciating the diversity and the dilemmas of problem-solving and getting organizations and nations to function. Learning about leadership also involves the study of the special chemistry that develops between leaders and followers."

The above quote is a basic summary of Taylor and Rosenbach's book. Even though leadership is a complex subject, it can be learned.

MANAGEMENT Principles and Practices

David H. Holt is presently W.L. Moody Professor of

Entrepreneurship at James Madison University where, in 1981, he
founded and served as first director of the Center for

Entrepreneurship in the University's College of Business. He has
taught business management in Japan: consulted in Austria and
Brussels: and set up businesses in Mexico and China. He was a
Visiting Scholar in management in Hong Kong and is a member of
numerous professional organizations. He comments:

"Historians and philosophers have tried for centuries to understand how great men and women achieve extraordinary success. Some people's success has been attributed to charisma or to a dominate personality. Others seem to have been "born to lead," to have inherited the traits necessary to achieve monumental results. Most theorists still disagree on exactly how leaders are made. What we do know is that leadership can be studied, and as we become more aware of how successful men and women lead others, we can model the process ourselves." 18

The same problems that we ponder in the military seem to also occur in the private world. Most reputable theorists conclude: (1) leaders are made not born, (2) some individuals have more potential than others to be influential leaders (3) leadership skills can be learned (4) leadership studies should focus on developing these skills to improve individual and organizational effectiveness and (5) leadership remains an enigma.

Holt believes we, in the United States, still revere our TV heroes for their physical prowess and our heroines for their

beauty, revealing our propensity to believe physical attributes are related to leadership ability. This belief is the point I made about the paradigm we established early in our lives. This paradigm is difficult to break but if we identify this shortcoming during our training process we should be able to overcome this problem.

Another area Holt discussed was "Transformational leadership". This is the ability of leaders to make profound changes, to introduce new vision for their organizations, and to inspire people to work toward achieving those visions.

"Transformational leadership addresses the human resource issues of managing a multi-cultural organization, but it also encompasses a philosophy of leadership whereby leaders are able to make profound changes, introduce new visions for their organizations, and inspire people to work toward achieving those visions. Transformational leadership is the process of making fundamental changes in where an organization is headed.¹⁹

A "Transformational Leader" is to the civilian (manager) world that a "Strategic Leader" is to the military. Holt's conclusion is that you can learn or be taught to be a Transformational Leader.

Another of Holt's conclusions, is that all models emphasize leadership skills can be learned and managers (strategic leaders) can adapt and improve their skills. Holt also suggested a company might employ a skills approach to leadership which focuses on improving the interpersonal relationship of managers and their subordinates.

Section IV

MILITARY VIEWS

In the earlier sections I covered my early personal views or paradigms on leaders and discussed numerous academic views on the age old question of whether Strategic Leaders are born or made. In this section I will look at some of the military's views on whether Strategic Leaders are Born or Made.

STRATEGIC ART: The New Discipline for 21st Century Leaders

Major General Chilcoat, the Commandant of the U.S. Army War College, makes some very good points in his pamphlet STRATEGIC
ART: The New Discipline for 21st Century Leaders.

"Competencies are developed by the master of the strategic art during the course of a lifetime of education, service, and experience: The Strategic Leader provides vision and focus, capitalizes on command and peer leadership skills, and inspires others to think and act.²⁰

Views I have presented in this paper do not conflict with this statement. All the points he makes are skills which can be learned and taught. They are not skills with which one is born with. Another point he makes is "The master requires the ability to sense and compensate for his own weaknesses, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of others, and to craft symbolic relationships among individuals to create an effective team. It is very difficult for one to recognize his own weaknesses. But it is a task that all Strategic Leaders must master.

General Chilcoat's belief that in the past the process of mastering strategy was informal and often ad hoc is not a new idea. However, he feels that:

"With the establishment of the service war colleges and the development of strategic studies as an academic discipline in the 20th century, efforts have been made to formalize and improve this process. These efforts must continue into the 21st century as the formal mechanisms for cultivating strategic skill are reassessed and modified."²²

We must continue with the understanding of the adult learning process and Chilcoat's belief that a skilled mentor is important. The education process must change as we get older. When we were young we did not question what the first grade teacher taught us. We just accepted it as fact. Now, as we are older, we tend to question everything. We must understand this adult learning process and enhance it.

Mentors can make learning easier with their insights from years of experience. There probably are those with promise of strategic skill who never found a mentor, and thus did not reach their full potential. Having a mentor is important in the process of developing Strategic Leaders but is not an absolute requirement. I myself read very little during my lifetime, yet using the Marine Corps standard have been successful as a military leader. I attribute my success to highly competent mentors. However, I have also discussed mentors with numerous successful contemporaries, who had limited association with mentors. They attribute their success to a lifelong quest for knowledge, through reading, schools, and observing how not to do

things. General Chilcoat makes the same points that other military, academic, and business leaders make: Strategic Leadership skills are developed over the course of a career through formal and informal education and self-development, and additionally through professional experience. Leaders can be made.

FM 22-100

Military Leadership

"The Army has made a total commitment to develop leaders by providing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for them to exhibit the leadership characteristics and traits discussed in this manual. This objective is accomplished through a dynamic leader development system consisting of three equally important pillars: Schools, Experience, and Self-development."²³

I think most military Officers will agree that leaders can be developed. The U.S. Army has published five leadership doctrine manuals. Each manual addresses a specific leadership need, supports Army operations doctrine, and contributes to the Army's ability to accomplish its diverse missions:

- -FM 22-100 (Military Leadership) tells leaders how to lead in a direct, face-to-face mode.
- -FM 22-101 (Leadership Counseling) tells leaders how to conduct leadership counseling.
- -FM 22-102 (Soldier Team Development) tells leaders how to develop soldier teams, at company level and below, that can meet the challenges of combat.

- -FM 22-103 (Leadership and Command at Senior Levels) gives principles and a framework for leading and commanding at senior levels.
- FM 25-100 (Training the Force) provides expectations and standards for leaders on training doctrine.

"Leading effectively is not a mystery and can be learned through self-study, education, training, and experience. Successful leaders prepare for war by training and leading as they intend to fight."24

General Carl E. Vuono, CSA, stated in March 1979 "Our leader development programs are one of the most important ways we maintain the quality force and are also our greatest legacy because they provide the leaders that will shape the army of tomorrow."²⁵

From the above information it is evident that the U.S. Army believes that you can be taught to be a leader. All the other Services also have programs that teach you to be a leader. These service programs all support my position that Strategic Leaders can be MADE.

Section V

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

What is a Strategic Leader? The U.S. Army War College defines **STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP** as: "the process used by a leader to affect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood

vision by:

INFLUENCING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE
ALLOCATING RESOURCES
DIRECTING THROUGH POLICY/DIRECTIVE
BUILDING CONSENSUS

Within a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous global environment which is marked by possibilities and threats"26

Gen Maxwell Thurman, U.S. Army Retired, said "...Strategic

Leadership work...is...getting the organization moving for the next ten to twenty years, providing that vision that will get you there and creating an institutional culture."27 A Strategic

Leader is the person who does this. But how does he do these things? He has to have learned throughout his military career.

There is no career path to being a Strategic Leader. He must use the things that he was taught.

The point I have been trying to make throughout this paper is: you can learn to be a better leader through education. There will always be some people who will be better leaders than others. This will be due either to the individual being born with some undefinable characteristic or having been a better student. On an individual basis it would be difficult or impossible to prove what made the difference. However, the main point appears to be irrefutable, you can learn to be a better leader. Take yourself as an example. Are you a better leader today than you were before you came in the service. I am pretty sure that all of you will say that you are a better leader today.

So how did you become a better leader? You became a better leader through the military education system.

Section VI

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I reviewed the various positions on whether Strategic Leaders are born or made. Most authorities concurred that leaders can be taught the skills required to be a Strategic Leader. Some believe there are individuals who will never be Strategic Leaders but this is due mainly to the lack of desire by the individual.

There were four things that surfaced during my research. To be a successful Strategic Leader you must first have a (true) desire to be one. Second, you must be willing to make the many sacrifices that are required. Third, is the role of a "MENTOR" in the process. Hopefully you will be lucky enough to have a good mentor or mentors, throughout your career, who will guide you and teach you to become a successful Strategic Leader. Fourth, you must have the opportunity to be a Strategic Leader. We never know when we will get an opportunity to be a Strategic Leader, thus preparation is essential. "Success goes to the prepared."

The old cliche, "a born leader of men" is not valid for the purposes of the United States Military. Although such individuals may exist, we cannot wait for their appearance, and

even then they would certainly be in the minority. No, the military services have a mission to perform, and it is Soldiers, Sailors, Airman and Marines - as individuals and as members of a Team - who must accomplish this mission. Someone must be a mentor and lead those individuals and build that team, and that someone is us.

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